

II. THE CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH MEDIEVAL MONASTICISM¹

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STUDENTS of history are well aware of the ambiguity of the term medieval. Although it may be true that for some thousand years, between *c.* 500 and *c.* 1500 A.D., the social, economic, political and religious life of Western Europe had characteristics easily distinguishable on a broad view from the ancient Greco-Roman civilization that preceded, and from what we call the modern world of nation-states that followed, yet within that millennium the developments are so great, and the changes and declines so numerous, that the careful historian distrusts anything approaching to a general judgment which might confuse century with century, and region with region. Yet in spite of this, many, whose knowledge of the social or artistic life of past ages is very wide, forget such distinctions, and speak readily of the medieval papacy, the medieval village, the medieval craftsman or medieval philosophy, as if each of these expressions denoted a single clear-cut system or institution.

Nowhere, perhaps, is this confusion more common than when the monastic life is being considered. It is true that from *c.* 600 to 1540, with a few early intervals of extinction, monasteries and monks filled a conspicuous place in English life and on the English scene, whereas before Augustine they were unknown and since Thomas Cromwell they have been, for all practical purposes, non-existent. There is, therefore, a great temptation to assess all values in the gross, and to pass a single comprehensive judgment. Thus the extreme Protestant of past centuries, whose views on the monastic ideal coloured all his vision, made little distinction between the Dark Ages, the age of Bernard, and the decline of the Middle Ages. Romantic historians, on the other hand, not a few archaeologists, and multitudes of the general public, seduced by the extraordinary beauty of the monastic ruins, and the vision of a life utterly remote from modern experience, tend to confuse all epochs in a picture reproducing the first fervours of Jarrow, Bec and Rievaulx. And on the point of monastic cultural influence, while to many Englishmen of the past the whole sum of the monastic contribution seemed worthless, if not positively evil, the more recent tendency—never wholly absent from learned circles since the days of Spelman and Cotton—has been to regard monasticism throughout the centuries as a beneficent source of light. In point of fact, during the eight hundred odd years of its active existence, English monasticism passed more than once through every phase from nonentity to supreme importance.

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The so-called medieval period is divided very sharply by the first renaissance of the eleventh century. Until *c.* 1050 the history of civilization in Western Europe is that of a series of efforts at various times and places to arrive at order and light by imitating the past. It was a period from which efficient organization, scientific thought, and intellectual self-confidence were absent. From *c.* 1000 onwards, first in north Italy and later in France, a vital change occurred, manifested by the reform movement in the Church, by the evolution of scientific feudalism and the machinery of government in the State, and by the appearance of a new architecture and sculpture, and a new philosophy. Self-confidence and a critical sense reappeared, and with them the possibility of real originality and steady progress in things of the mind.

These two great divisions are seen reflected or refracted in the history of monasticism. The first corresponds very roughly to what have been called the Benedictine centuries; the latter to what may be called, less aptly perhaps, the centuries of the schools and universities. The divisions of monastic history, however, do not perfectly coincide with those of European culture. At the crisis of change there is as it were a time-lag of almost a century. Since the monks, at least north of the Alps, were at first almost the only possessors of the two great requisites for intellectual work, sheltered leisure and books, they were the first to benefit by and to exploit the revival with which they had no direct causal connexion. In consequence, between 1050 and 1150, the monasteries of Europe had, in matters purely intellectual, an influence greater than before. This they soon lost, and a convenient date for the change may be found in 1153, when the death of St Bernard was immediately preceded by that of his disciple, Eugenius III, and followed in the same autumn by that of the most eminent English Cistercian, archbishop Henry Murdac of York.

We may therefore begin by dividing the history of monastic influence into two periods: from the coming of Augustine till *c.* 1150, and from 1150 till the Dissolution; and speaking very generally, we may say that in the earlier of these periods the intellectual and cultural life of England was often at its purest and most intense within the monasteries, and that they were the principal depositories and diffusers of all culture, whereas in the latter period the intellectual initiative had passed to secular schools and universities and, later, to the world of individual scholars and their writings.

These two broad divisions may themselves be split into several sections. Speaking again very generally, it may be said that from 600 to 1066 the achievement of the monks was to preserve the legacy of the past—the attenuated Greco-Roman learning as well as that of the early Church—and to imbue with it a small but influential group within and without the monastery, while in England, also, as nowhere else in Western Europe, there was a native, non-Latin, literary and artistic life which was stimulated rather than transformed by foreign contact. From 1066, for a century or more, the

monasteries, while losing their missionary character, were the great centres of the new literary culture, and counted among their inmates in England a very large proportion of the ablest ecclesiastics and writers; this phase, which began abruptly with the Norman Conquest, waned gradually and in varying degrees between 1150 and 1200 or even later in isolated houses. A characteristic of the whole period from the beginning till 1150 is that during this time a very high proportion of the best minds of the country was nurtured from childhood in the monasteries, or attracted later to the cloister.

The second division, from *c.* 1150 to the Dissolution, is less susceptible of analysis. In general, however, three phases are discernible. The first, from *c.* 1150 to *c.* 1275, is a pale reflection of what had gone before. The culture of the monasteries is of the same kind as hitherto, but less intense and far less influential. From *c.* 1275 to *c.* 1420 another phase can be recognized. The phenomenal development of university education and of the student orders of friars had left the monasteries in a backwater from which they endeavoured to emerge into the stream by opening houses at the universities. For a century and a half, therefore, the ablest and most influential monks passed many years of their lives at Oxford or (later) Cambridge as students, lecturers or priors of the monastic colleges. Finally, from *c.* 1420 onwards, when the age of the schools and of theological controversy had ceased, though the monks continued to frequent the universities, this had little significance in the life of the times. The few notable figures are rather those of the pioneers of the English renaissance.

Having thus passed in rapid review the medieval centuries, it is possible to return for a closer scrutiny.

Monasticism entered England from Italy with Augustine and his companions, but apart from the breath of Roman life that accompanied the introduction of Christianity there is no evidence that the monastic and semi-monastic communities that came into being in Kent or near London had any intellectual life. The first real flowering of monastic learning and art was towards the end of the seventh century. With the story of this we are not concerned, save to recall that its development was almost simultaneous in Northumbria and in Wessex. In the north the Celtic monachism of Iona and Lindisfarne was fused with the Mediterranean tradition by Benet Biscop, the founder of Jarrow and Wearmouth. Biscop was a most assiduous agent of civilization; in addition to the Rule of St Benedict and the customs of European monasteries, he brought to Jarrow continental methods of building and glazing, books of all kinds and the Roman antiphoner and chant, together with a living norm of ceremony and music in the person of John, arch-cantor of St Peter's. The Lindisfarne monks, for their part, already possessed one art in great perfection, that of manuscript illumination, and the whole region was instinct with the life of which such precious fragments remain in the poetry of *The Rood* and the crosses of Bewcastle and Ruthwell. When the two

traditions fused, the Roman was the stronger, perhaps because the Northumbrian mind was more susceptible to European than to Celtic influence; the soil of the north, however, was peculiarly receptive, and for half a century the group of monasteries between Wear and Tweed formed a centre of art and learning surpassing in purity all else in Western Europe, and gave birth to the Lindisfarne Gospels, the *Codex Amiatinus* and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Bede.

A sober scholar of our day has written of 'the miracle of Bede', and another of 'the portent of learning and sanctity' in the North. The appearance, indeed, of such a lucid intelligence at such an epoch and at the very periphery of the civilized world, is a marvel for which no adequate cause can be assigned. The breadth of Bede's learning, though great and most remarkable at such a time and place, is not without parallel; what is unparalleled is the combination of rare industry with a love of absolute historical truth, and the command of a method and style that allow facts and judgments to pour through unstained, like light through clear glass. Bede has indeed the mental limitations of his age; he does not judge men or policies with the depth and subtlety of a Thucydides or a Tacitus, nor does he see in the past a ceaseless, varied stream of caused and causing movement; his primary interest is in persons and in the affairs of the Church, and he does not exclude direct supernatural intervention in human affairs. But he has none of the faults of his age; he is without prejudice, without spite, without superstition, without a love of the marvellous and the monstrous; he lives, in short, in a rational world, even if it be the world of a pure-minded, unsophisticated child. Standing as he does at the fountain-head of English scholarship—the true father of English history—he has a threefold significance for all who follow him: he is the sole literary authority for all English ecclesiastical history down to his day; he sets a standard of sobriety, completeness and truth which subsequent generations recognized, even if they did not equal it; and in his personality, never obtruded but always visible, he fixed for the Middle Ages and beyond the type of monk-historian, laborious, sane, constructive, benevolent.

The immediate influence of Bede was not great. Northumbrian monasticism scarcely survived its golden age, though it doubtless helped to mould the school of York and Alcuin. Indirectly, however, his influence was immense. His works were multiplied and broadcast in England and the West; his narrative was appropriated and abbreviated by others, and he served as an ideal which generations of subsequent historians consciously strove to attain.

At the very moment of the foundation of Jarrow, a revival of learning was taking place in the monasteries of the south. Theodore of Tarsus, a Basilian monk, sent to be archbishop of Canterbury, and his companion Hadrian, abbot of a Neapolitan monastery, accompanied the impact of a new wave of Mediterranean culture. But whereas in the north the art and learning are a virile, native growth, in the south there is an exotic touch. The mists suddenly

vanish from the Wessex landscape; the sun shines, and the plain, unpruned native trees are seen to bear the strangest, brightest fruit:

miranturque novas frondes et non sua poma.

Such is Aldhelm, the first to compose original works in West England, a writer in verse and the strange prose studded with transliterated Byzantine words which has not yet received the careful study it deserves; such are the numerous small monasteries and nunneries from Exeter to Nursling where a literary culture flourished which allowed monks and nuns to correspond in excellent Latin and occasional hexameters with Boniface and his colleagues in Germany or at Rome. Here, as in Northumbria, though for different reasons, the time of flowering was brief. The grafted trees run wild; the light flares out. Aldhelm takes his place in the *Patrologia*, indistinguishable in type from writers of other countries; no literary or artistic work survives from southern England comparable to the writings of Bede, nor, so far as we know, to the Lindisfarne Gospels. The learning of the south had, however, a permanent monument in the monasteries and the Christian civilization of western and southern Germany, the apostolic work of a monk from Devon.

In the course of the eighth and early ninth centuries monasticism and its culture virtually disappeared from both the north and south of England—from the north owing to the Scandinavian invasions; from the south through lack of any fresh impulse from abroad and any true centre or system of education at home. The small and scattered monastic houses of England had neither the libraries nor the reserves of life that made Fulda, St Gall, Corbie, Cluny and others all but immortal. Perhaps, also, the purely imitative Latin learning was always doomed to a short life.

The next revival, that of Alfred, was wholly unmonastic. Alfred planned to revive the religious life, but he lived only to make a modest beginning which soon languished. The real awakening came fifty years after his death, first, from 943 onwards, under Dunstan at Glastonbury, and later, in the reign of King Edgar, from Abingdon and Ramsey also, under Ethelwold and Oswald. The splendour of this revival has been fully recognized only in recent years, by historians such as the late Dean Armitage Robinson and S. J. Crawford, and students of literature and art such as Professor R. W. Chambers and Mr A. W. Clapham. It differed from the earlier southern revival in several important respects: it was, for the first time, definitely educational in its aim and national in scope; it carried on and amplified the tradition of Alfred by translating patristic works into English and by continuing the Old English *Chronicle*; and it embraced all forms of literature and music and the minor fine arts such as illumination, carving and metal-work. It was, therefore, half a rebirth and half a new creation; the models were the old ones, and there was no original thought, simply an attempt to understand and hand down that of Augustine or Gregory or Isidore, but the vehicle, the language, was, at least in the hands

of Aelfric and Wulfstan and the writers of the Old English *Chronicle*, both original and beautiful. And in the arts of illumination, of goldsmith's work, and of the Gregorian chant and its developments, masterpieces of supreme beauty were produced.

It would indeed be difficult to exaggerate the merits of this cultural achievement. What has been called the Winchester style of manuscript painting, of which masterpieces survive in the New Minster charter of Edgar (966), the Benedictional of St Ethelwold (c. 980), and the somewhat later Missal and Benedictional of Robert of Jumièges, is now recognized as an idiom common to all the larger houses of the monastic revival, and the Old English style of outline drawing was equally widely practised. In Gregorian plain-chant the purest traditions were preserved and additions were from time to time made in a manner not unworthy of the original corpus, while in polyphony the large abbeys and cathedral monasteries, with a command of trained boys' voices, made advances which, when the many surviving manuscripts of music have been studied, will probably appear of the greatest significance in the evolution of European music.

At the same time, the copying of manuscripts in a clear and beautiful script was everywhere part of the normal work of the cloister, and though it is true that, owing to the absence of primitive archetypes of classical and patristic texts, the manuscripts of English origin are not often of the first class, yet they served to keep alive in the country a knowledge of the Latin writers, while in the case of Old English poetry and the so-called *Saxon Chronicle* almost all the surviving manuscripts are of monastic provenance.

This great movement of culture was wholly monastic in origin, and was guided throughout by monks; it was also consciously expansive, and it seems certain that it was freely diffused not only by treatises, homilies and translations but also by way of classroom education to all who came, though from the circumstances of the time these were necessarily few and for the most part aspirants to the monastic life. The century preceding the Norman Conquest was in fact one—and the only one—in which the monasteries were the cultural and educational heart of England; previously, they had been isolated and enclosed reservoirs; subsequently, they were to be merely one among several agencies, but in the days of Ethelwold and Aelfric they dominated the higher life of the country.

The literary impulse had died down before the Conquest; as with the preceding waves of life, there was no organization and no self-possessed criticism to carry over the first growth, though something of it sprang up again at Worcester and Evesham shortly before 1066. It has recently been the fashion to deplore the Conquest. It is indeed arguable that had there been no invasion the arts—or at least the minor arts—would have continued to surpass in richness and delicacy all that the Continent could create, and that the native literature would have developed into full independence, but

there can be no real question as to the balance of loss and gain in the field of intellectual effort. It was through the Norman Conquest that England shared in the two greatest benefits of the new renaissance: critical self-confidence, and a rational system of education.

For almost half a century after 1070 the black monk monasteries of Europe enjoyed all the advantages of the new world and the old. They were still far richer in the implements of learning and opportunities for study than were the small episcopal or urban schools, and the system of lectures and disputations, which was possible only in a freer, larger atmosphere than that of a monastery, had not yet absorbed all talent at the expense of a purely literary training. Consequently, they still drew to themselves many of the most brilliant minds of the age—a Lanfranc, an Anselm, an Abelard and an Ailred—and were able for a few decades to offer more attractions to the disciple than did the cathedral schools which often depended on a single master. In other words, educational and cultural resources were still dispersed at numerous centres of equal strength, and many of these were monasteries.

In England, as is well known, a monastic revival of great fervour and wide extension followed the Norman Conquest, and abbots were drafted across the Channel by the Conqueror from the houses of highest reputation—Bec, Caen, St Evroul, Mont St Michel, Jumièges. The two most celebrated teachers of the age, Lanfranc and Anselm, had direct influence both in Normandy and England on men who were later to rule English sees and abbeys. Nothing indeed is more impressive than the high level of intellectual and artistic life that rose so soon at so many English houses. Not only the great monasteries at or near the centres of national life—Canterbury, Westminster, Winchester, St Albans—but houses in the Cotswolds and the Fens—a Malmesbury, a Thorney, a Ramsey—became self-sufficient islands of life, literary, artistic and musical. Gilbert Crispin of Westminster, Faricius of Abingdon, Symeon of Winchester among the Normans, and Eadmer of Canterbury, Symeon of Durham and William of Malmesbury from among the native monks are some of the most familiar names, and it is perhaps significant that while the three foreigners are noted for theology, medicine and satirical poetry, the three great English writers are one and all historians. The culture transmitted was, in fact, almost wholly literary, and something in the national character turned the most receptive of its adepts in England to the writing of history. The two great disciplines that were to inform the young universities—law and philosophy—took no foothold in this country for almost a century after 1066, even though Vacarius settled at York.

The Anglo-Norman literary achievement was undoubtedly wider, deeper and more mature than that of the Edgareine revival. Though it produced no writer or thinker of absolute greatness comparable to Anselm or Abelard or Bernard of Clairvaux, one at least of the historians, William of Malmesbury, is in scope and power of criticism and judgment the greatest English medieval

historian after Bede, and the monastic school of historians and chroniclers, and still more the monastic scribes and illuminators, reached a level of excellence unsurpassed in any other country of Europe, and founded traditions of method and technique which were copied by subsequent generations and have benefited all centuries since that time. The great Bibles and Psalters, in which the Norman boldness of design and brilliance of colour was blended with the native delicacy and fancy, were the product of houses as widely separated as Winchester, Bury and Durham, and until the close of the century the art, admittedly at the height of excellence, was almost exclusively the product of monastic *scriptoria*. At the same time the script in use for all purposes in the cloister was brought to the highest level of beauty, clarity and accuracy that has ever been attained by a hand in use for all purposes, and this was a circumstance not without its effect upon the transmission of the legacy of the past. Yet in one important respect the Anglo-Norman monastic culture was less genial than the Old English: it was enjoyed exclusively by the monks. After the Conquest, the number of lay children educated in the cloister was negligible, while in the course of the twelfth century the whole domestic economy of the monasteries was changed by the gradual abolition of child oblation, a practice as old as Western monasticism itself. After c. 1150 the monasteries were recruited in growing numbers from those who had learnt their letters outside the cloister or who had passed through a course and even taken a degree at some celebrated foreign school or university. Thus the specifically monastic culture was contaminated and weakened.

The rise of the universities, indeed, with their schools of law, medicine and speculative theology, was fatal to the old monastic education, which was purely literary and static. The new learning depended on a constant flow and interchange of students, teachers and ideas, and while hitherto a gifted mind could find and absorb all the available knowledge in a steady, unbroken intake from boyhood to age between the walls of a well-stocked library, aided by the advice of elders, henceforward the process was broken and divided—vertically by the separation of the grammar school from the lecture room, horizontally by the specialization of old and new branches of learning. For a brief space some of the best minds of the new discipline found their way to the cloister—Marlborough of Evesham and the group of physicians at St Albans—but gradually the stream dried up. The great historians of the period 1150–1215 are clerks or regular canons—Ralph of Diceto, ‘Benedict of Peterborough’, Gerald of Wales, William of Newburgh—while the most notable monastic writings are domestic and personal chronicles, such as those of Jocelin of Brakelond and Gervase of Canterbury, or biographies such as the life of the last great monk-bishop, St Hugh, by the latest monastic biographer, Adam of Eynsham. In other words, from 1150 onwards, in ever-growing measure, the monastic culture became a purely private possession limited to a very few fields of achievement, the writing of chronicles and the illuminating of

manuscripts. Even in these departments a decline in the quality and quantity of the work becomes evident before 1200, and save for a single house no literary and very little artistic work of the first quality was produced by the black monks after the reign of John. The thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were, in England as elsewhere, the age of the friars and the schools.

Hitherto only the black monks have been considered. The various orders of canons, though monastic in character, do not strictly fall into the scope of this paper. Their contribution was, in fact, indistinguishable in type from that of the monks. As for the Cistercians, they were in origin and by primitive legislation debarred from learning, literature and art. The exuberant genius of Bernard, however, broke through the dykes, and in subsequent generations the white monks became more and more assimilated to the black. In England few Cistercians appear as scholars or writers, with the notable exceptions of Gilbert of Swineshead, who completed the *Sermons on the Canticle* left unfinished by Bernard, and Ailred of Rievaulx, the Bernard of the north, who composed a series of treatises, half spiritual, half philosophical in character, and several short historical works. The latter, purely English in inspiration, take their place alongside of the larger works of the monks of Durham and the canons of Hexham; the former derive a peculiar interest and charm from the personality of their author and the picture they give of eager debates in the cloister of Rievaulx, but in the history of thought they are survivals, the last of their kind, the last of a long line stretching back seven hundred years. The future lay, not with meditative disquisition in the style of Augustine, but with the less literary, more formal, practical, comprehensive work of Ailred's contemporaries Gratian and Peter Lombard.

Whatever may have been the influence of the monasteries on the country at large, there can be no question of the thoroughness of the education in letters within their walls. The ablest minds were rendered humane, expansive, European. This was given, while the fresh impulse from France lasted, to nunneries also, and, as in the days of Boniface, nuns of Wessex were able to add their copy of hexameters or elegiacs to the *bede* rolls that were passed round from house to house.

As has been suggested above, the characteristic monastic culture gradually lost its strength between 1150 and 1250. There was, however, one exception to the general decline, and that so illustrious that it has often been considered as typical rather than as unique. The great abbey of St Albans harboured during the first half of the thirteenth century a school of painters and illuminators of which the Colchesters are the most celebrated names, and a series of historians culminating in the celebrated Matthew Paris, who is commonly regarded as the greatest monastic historian of the Middle Ages. St Albans stands alone. From the first coming of Lanfranc's nephew, Paul of Caen, until the days of Whethamstede that great abbey remained something of an Athens among the monasteries of England, a home of books and art. Never-

theless, its current reputation in manuals of history and archaeology is probably an exaggerated one. The illumination of the school of St Albans cannot compare in subtlety of colour and delicacy of design with the Old English, or even with the Anglo-Norman, masterpieces, and those familiar with the works of all the monastic writers will probably consider William of Malmesbury, and perhaps Eadmer also, superior to Paris in the nobler qualities of a historian, those of careful criticism and sober judgment. The vivacity, the broad and coloured canvas, and the national and personal prejudices of the later writer have no doubt combined to make his admirers too indulgent to one who, with all his shortcomings, is necessarily a principal source of information for the period.

Within twenty years of the death of Paris the focus of the artistic and intellectual activity of the country had finally shifted from the cloister. Illumination and craft work had passed into the hands of secular clerks and laymen, and even the straightforward copying of books, which could be accomplished as a routine task by those without any artistic talent, had ceased to be a normal employment of monks and had become a commercial operation for professional writers.

Henceforward, therefore, such influence as the monks might exert as a body was limited; the great English names of the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries are those of friars—Adam Marsh, Alexander of Hailes, Roger Bacon, Robert Kilwardby, Haymo of Faversham, Duns Scotus, John Baconthorpe, and William of Ockham. This essay, in consequence, loses its theme at the death of Matthew Paris. Since, however, later monastic literary activity has been either exaggerated or neglected, it may be permissible to carry the story forward to the end.

The thirteenth century, which opened with the call to simplicity of the unlettered Francis and his early followers, saw the gradual drift of all the religious orders into the whirlpool of the schools. The Preachers led the way, followed by the Minors and the Augustinian Hermits, the Carmelites and all the lesser orders of friars. Hitherto, as has been noted, some of the ablest graduates had passed into the monastic life; now this source of recruitment dried up; boys of promise with a desire for a religious and intellectual life now joined the friars. Moreover, the monks, scattered and static, were debarred from any share in the life of the schools, while their own traditional literary culture had gone wholly out of fashion. It was natural, therefore, that they should endeavour to find a place for themselves at the universities, and from *c.* 1270 onwards a series of efforts was made by some of the most eminent abbots, both black and white, to open common houses of studies at Oxford and compel each monastery to pay its quota and send up a percentage of its subjects. The system was ultimately taken into the discipline of the Church by Benedict XII in his Constitution of 1337. Strangely enough, the Cistercians were first in the field with Rewley Abbey, and between *c.* 1280 and 1437 five

monastic priories or colleges came into being, four at Oxford and one at Cambridge, and in consequence almost all the leading monks appear as bachelors or doctors of divinity, and often spent years in teaching at the university or governing the monastic college. Research has shown that from the early years of their connexion they took part in public disputations and filled university offices. A wholly new type appeared—the university monk—of which Adam Easton and Ughtred of Boldon are conspicuous examples. No monk, however, rose to an eminence as leader of thought comparable to the great friars; the mental climate of the monastic life has never proved genial to speculative or scholastic theology, and it would be hard to point to a single speculative theologian of the first rank from among the white or black monks since the days of Anselm. Nevertheless, monks took considerable part in the domestic controversies of the late fourteenth century, in particular those between the mendicant and possessioner religious, and that occurring in the latter phases of Wyclif's career. On the other hand, no monk, so far as is at present known, contributed to the remarkable body of spiritual writings of the century known as the school of the English mystics; such spiritual writings as have survived are either meditative treatises of the traditional type, or discussions of questions of monastic discipline. Nor can the career in another field of the poet John Lydgate of Bury be taken as representative of his order. Throughout the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries certain monasteries stand out from the rest in academic distinction. Durham is *facile princeps*; as it was not a member of the southern province, to which belonged the common house at Oxford, the priory sent monks to Oxford independently, and ultimately possessed a college of its own. Of the rest, Norwich, Worcester and St Albans were most distinguished in the academic life; Canterbury, though it too had a college of its own, as claiming exemption from the provincial chapter, never rivalled Durham.

If scholastic theology as such was alien to the spirit of monasticism, the rebirth of humanistic, literary culture in the fifteenth century might seem to have been more attractive to the black monks. There were, in fact, not a few adepts in the monasteries of Italy, which possessed libraries whither the eminent humanists resorted to explore the classical manuscripts. England, however, especially the England of the fifteenth century, was far from Italy, and the individual abbeys were not rich enough in classical manuscripts, least of all Greek classical manuscripts, to give an imaginative impulse to a young scholar. There was, indeed, in fifteenth-century England nothing of the artistic ferment and keen intellectual life of the cities of central and northern Italy.

Nevertheless, two distinguished monks have been sometimes noted as harbingers of English humanism. The first of these, Whethamstede, abbot of St Albans from 1420 to 1465, has until recent years been allowed to retain the reputation he held among contemporaries. In reality, however, he is a figure

of no great importance in the history of learning. Though he travelled extensively in renaissance Italy, and took an interest in some of the literary branches of Italian humanism, he was completely blind to much of what passed before his eyes and remained, in style and in thought, a typical child of the dying Middle Age. The second, William Tilley of Selling, monk and later prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, is of another calibre. He was not the first monk at Canterbury College to admire the new learning, which the benefactions of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, George Neville and others had introduced at Oxford, but he was the first English monk to imbibe the spirit and practise the arts of humanism. He wrote and spoke in pure and fluent Latin; what was more, he taught Greek and collected Greek texts in his monastery at Canterbury, and, with that strange fortune which so often blesses genius in teaching, counted among his few pupils Thomas Linacre. He is in every way a figure of the first importance in the early days of English humanism.

Selling had no worthy successor, but a few of the superiors of the last generation were friends of learning, among them Thomas Milling prior of Westminster, later bishop of Hereford, Richard Bere of Glastonbury and above all Abbot Kidderminster of Winchcombe. These, however, were in a sense accidental examples. There was no strong intellectual discipline among the monks at any single house, still less throughout the whole body. Such intellectual life as existed in conservative or neo-Catholic circles flowed into other channels. There was a small group of Cambridge traditionalists—an interesting pendant to the brilliant reformers—who owed the cast of their minds to Fisher and the Lady Margaret and who formed the intellectual core of the opposition which Henry encountered at the London Charterhouse and Syon. At the Charterhouse the Prior, John Houghton, was a Cambridge man, and among the Carthusians executed was the scholar William Exmew of Christ's and Augustine Webster, to whom Cranmer gave the epithet 'learned'. At Syon, besides the confessor-general, Fewterer of Pembroke Hall and Richard Whytford of Queens', there was Richard Reynolds, who suffered with the Carthusians; his college was Christ's and he was an excellent scholar in Hebrew as well as Greek and Latin; Reginald Pole, who knew him well, described him as the most learned religious of his day. In all these, however, their scholarship was personal and in no sense due to their profession. On a broad view, the specifically monastic influence in the world of learning was negligible, and interesting as it may be to speculate on the part that a reformed monasticism might have played in an un-Reformed England, materials for such speculations are wholly lacking, and the very different circumstances of Spain and France forbid the drawing of any analogy from abroad.

Nothing has yet been said in this paper of monastic influence on architecture. The subject is a large one, and many points still require critical elucidation; moreover, the monks had influence not so much as individuals

as in their capacity of corporate bodies making certain architectural demands. A few words, however, may be permitted.

Before 1066, apart from Biscop's importations at Wearmouth and Jarrow, there is little to record. Old English architecture, with all the merits that have been so warmly set out by Mr Clapham, remained comparatively small in scale, and there is nothing to suggest that a monastic church differed in dimensions or decoration from other important churches. Nor is there any record that Dunstan and Ethelwold, who composed music, worked in metal, and constructed organs, also added practical architecture to their accomplishments. On the other hand, the influence of the monks on the new Romanesque of Normandy and England was immense. However elementary the technique and rude the decoration of the early Norman churches may have been, a norm was set up of plan and dimensions for large churches which subsequent centuries modified but did not wholly alter, and which has influenced all large Norman and Gothic churches from that day to this. It is not always recognized that several features of this design—and those the most remarkable—are due to its origin among the great monasteries of Normandy. Of these, the elongated choir, often still too short to hold all the stalls, and the still longer nave, designed solely for ceremonial processions, were due entirely to monastic tastes and demands, as were also the early transeptal and apsidal chapels, while length of nave and choir carried with it, as a necessary artistic consequence, a great increase in roof-height. All these features were reproduced in every great Anglo-Norman church, whether monastic or not, and were duly carried over into the Gothic style.

Individual monk-architects or master masons and sculptors after the Norman Conquest were as rare and accidental as have been Deans of cathedrals and Fellows of colleges with architectural or sculptural talents in the modern world, though notable examples have been found of all these classes. Gundulf of Rochester is perhaps the most eminent practical architect of the Anglo-Norman period. For long, however, the abbot or prior or major officials of the monastery (and in particular the sacrist) were directly in charge of the works affecting the fabric and decoration of the monastic church, and did in fact exercise an influence on plan, design and execution far greater than that of the normal patron in the ancient or modern ages of professional architecture. How far such eminent men as Alan of Walsingham at Ely and Abbot Wigmore at Gloucester were technically and artistically responsible for the masterpieces achieved under their supervision will perhaps always remain a matter of debate, though it is remarkable that both were skilled craftsmen. It is at least noteworthy that two of the major innovations in English architecture between the Conquest and the Dissolution—the completed stone vaulting introducing the pointed arch, and the so-called Perpendicular style, with its vast spaces of glass and its unbroken vaulting shafts—make their first full-scale appearance in monastic churches, at Durham and Gloucester,

while the evolution from Romanesque to Gothic was accelerated and conditioned by the set type of Cistercian church imported in its main lines from Burgundy.

On the whole, however, the chief and permanent influence of the monks on the fine arts of sculpture and architecture, and the lesser arts of decoration, metal-work and embroidery, was that of munificent patrons who often called the tune, rather than that of architects and artists who executed the work. Had all the objects of art, along with the service books and libraries of the monasteries, been preserved to the modern world, the extent of our debt to these patrons would have been more widely appreciated.

Looking back, therefore, after this short review we may make a general judgment in some such form as this. From the days of Augustine to the Norman Conquest the monks, when their institute flourished, were always a principal, and sometimes the sole, cultural force in the land. They preserved and multiplied manuscripts, they kept alive the study of letters, they carried the art of illumination to its highest pitch of excellence and they contributed not a little to the other arts. Benet Biscop in the north, Theodore and Hadrian in the south, together with their pupils and assistants in the west, gave notable and enduring impulses to culture, without which Anglo-Saxon civilization would have been infinitely the poorer, and that of South Germany would not have existed at all. And in Bede, an untravelled, untitled monk, there was given to the north the greatest literary figure of the early Middle Age. Later, under Dunstan and his associates, the monks once more gave to the nation all that was available of the culture of the past, and developed to a fine point all the arts of their own age; they also laid firm courses in the foundations of English literature; and for more than half a century they were the heart of civilized England.

With the Norman Conquest the influence of the monks changed. Though their purely literary work grew in bulk, in power and in originality, they were cultivating a field soon to lose its fertility, while their secular contemporaries were clearing the virgin forest to plant new crops. The monks ceased to be either directly or indirectly educators; they gave, however, to posterity masterpieces of the illuminator's art and a magnificent harvest of historical work. When full account is taken of all the records and charters, which are only now yielding their secrets to patient research, it must still be allowed that we owe to the monks and their imitators the mass of detailed and accurate information that has made of the Norman and Angevin periods such a vivid, living epoch to all succeeding generations of Englishmen.

Thenceforward, the monastic order ceased to exert any specific influence outside their own body, though monks for long took their part in public and university life and theological controversy. Before the end, much even of this had ceased, and with the opening of the sixteenth century the black and white monks were, as an intellectual and cultural force, all but negligible in the life of England.